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CAESAR AND THE AMBRONES

(Suetonius *Iulius* ix. 3)

By MONROE E. DEUTSCH

In connection with the *superior coniuratio* of 66–65 B.C., Suetonius gives us on the authority of the elder Curio and Marcus Actorius Naso certain details of the plots made by Gnaeus Piso and Caesar. Suetonius' account (*Iulius* ix. 3) closes as follows: *pactumque ut simul foris ille* (i.e. Piso), *ipse* (i.e. Caesar) *Romae ad res novas consurgerent, per †Ambranos et Transpadanos; destitutum utriusque consilium morte Pisonis.*¹

The tribes from which aid was expected in this revolution were the people beyond the Po and the *Ambrani*.² Scholars have struggled with the latter name for centuries. If the manuscripts have preserved the correct spelling, all we can say is that we have here a tribe mentioned, as far as we know, nowhere else in classical literature, and the connection of which with Caesar or Piso or both is, of course, equally unknown. If we are content with this, the problem is solved.

But scholars have not been content, and as a result a long list of conjectures for *Ambranos* has seen the light of day. Among these are the following:

Lambranos Sabellicus (the vulgate reading)³
Ambrones Ed. Bonon. 1488, Beroaldus
Ambronas Oudendorp
Ambarros Urlichs
Arvernus Mommsen
Campanos Madvig
Umbros Burmann

¹ Text of Ihm.

² *Ambranos* appears in all important MSS; certain MSS, referred to by Torentius and Oudendorp, read *Ambrones*.

³ All editions up to and including the year 1802 to which I have had access read *Lambranos*, save that Oudendorp (1751) has in his text *Ambranos*, though he strongly advocates the reading *Ambronas*; *Ambranos* is also found in Roth, Preud'homme, and Rolfe. Ihm in both editions daggars *Ambranos*. Baumgarten-Crusius (followed by the Delphin classics and the *Bibliotheca Classica*) and Breimi read *Ambronas*. Other readings mentioned as appearing in early editions are *Umbranos* and *Lubranos*. For discussions of the passage see: Halbertsmae *Adversaria Critica*, p. 168; Madvig, *Adversaria Critica*, II, 571; Mommsen, *Römische Geschichte*, III, 179; L. Urlichs, *Zu Suetonius Iul. 9 in Eos*, II (1866), 181; F. A. Wolf, *Kleine Schriften*, I, 112.

The main argument (in some instances, the only argument) for most of these proposals is the fact that they are easy paleographically. *Lambranos*, for example, does not exist as the name of a tribe, but is manufactured from the name of the river *Lambrus*.

The simplest suggestion is that of Beroaldus, *Ambrones*, or, better still, the other form *Ambronas*.¹ Paleographically it is excellent; the *a* and the *o* are merely interchanged, and the change is the easier through the influence of the ending *-anos* in *Transpadanos*.

Who then were the Ambrones?² They were a tribe whose previous abode is unknown, which participated in the southern expedition of the Cimbri and the Teutons, and in alliance with them fought against the Romans. They defeated Manlius and Caepio in 105 B.C., but were overwhelmingly defeated in their turn by Marius at Aquae Sextiae three years later. The sources are: Livy *Epitome* 68; Strabo iv. 183; Festus ep. 17; Vegetius *de re Militari* iii. 10; Orosius v. 16; Plutarch *Marius* 15, 19, and 20; Dio xlv. 42 and l. 24; Eutropius v. 1.³

All the sources quoted agree in joining them with the Cimbri or Teutons or both in the warfare against the Romans; their defeat and destruction are clearly set forth. Who, then, would these Ambrones in the passage in Suetonius be, and why should they be linked with Caesar in this conspiracy? In answer Oudendorp says: "vix ullum mihi est dubium, quin transpositis modo litteris legi debeat *Ambronas*, reliquias latrocinantium Gallorum, quos Marius delevit." To be sure, there may have been *reliquiae* of this tribe in Caesar's day; we recall, however, that the defeat at Aquae Sextiae was a crushing one, and the loss of life was heavy. Indeed, nowhere are any *reliquiae* mentioned.

Paleographically, the substitution of *Ambronas* is admirable, but the difficulty lies, first, in finding any tribe of this name in existence after the battle of Aquae Sextiae and, second, in seeing a connection between it and Caesar.

¹ *Ambronas* is the form of the accusative in the only Latin passage where the accusative is used, Orosius v. 16. 1; it is interesting to note that, in this passage in Orosius, MS D, has *ambranus* for *Ambronas*.

² The *o* is long in Plutarch *Marius* 15 (*bis*), 19 (*ter*), and 20 (*bis*), and in Strabo iv. 183; it is short in Dio xlv. 42. 4 and l. 24. 4.

³ Pauly-Wissowa, I (1894), 1808.

The solution is to be found, I believe, in Plutarch *Marius* 19. There we are told that at the opening of the battle of Aquae Sextiae the Ambrones, more than thirty thousand in number and the most warlike part of the army opposing the Romans, advanced to the fray, shouting often in unison "Ambrones," the name of their tribe, either in order to give one another encouragement or to frighten the enemy. The first of the Roman army to go against them were the Ligurians, and when they understood what it was the Ambrones were shouting, ἀντεφώνουν καὶ αὐτοὶ τὴν πάτριον ἐπὶ κλησιν αὐτῶν εἶναι· σφᾶς γὰρ αὐτοὺς οὕτως κατὰ γένος ὀνομάζουσι Λίγυες. And again and again the combatants on each side, Plutarch tells us, shouted back the name "Ambrones" at their antagonists.

In other words, the name Ambrones was used not only by the allies of the Cimbri and the Teutons, who were destroyed by Marius, but was also used by the Ligurians, the allies of Marius in this sweeping victory, and it is of the latter that I believe Suetonius is speaking. We do not need to have recourse to hypothetical *reliquiae*, for these Ambrones were the victors, and we are speaking of a time a little less than forty years after this victory.

The question, whether the statement concerning the relationship of the Ligurians and the Ambrones is true, does not concern us. It was apparently a tradition accepted by the Ligurians, and it therefore affected them precisely as if it were true.

Why, it will be asked, should these Ligurians have been ready to unite with Caesar in this plot? Because Caesar was by marriage Marius' nephew¹ and assumed the rôle of his "political heir."² It would then be highly natural for them to link themselves most closely with the kinsman and successor of their victorious leader of forty years before.

It was, indeed, during these very years that Caesar was stressing his relationship to Marius.³ During his quaestorship (68 or 67 B.C.),

¹ Plutarch *Caesar* 1; Dio xliii. 4. 2; *Bell. Afr.* 32. 3. Velleius Paterculus ii. 41. 2 speaks of Caesar as *C. Mario sanguine coniunctissimus*, and Nicolaus of Damascus (14) says: προσήπτετο γὰρ τὸ γένος τὸ Καίσαρός τε καὶ τὸ Μαρίου. . . .

² Sihler, *Annals of Caesar*, p. 62; cf. Plut. *Caes.* 6: ταύτην (i.e. the Marian party) ἀναρρῶσαι καὶ προσαγαγέσθαι βουλόμενος ("wishing to revive it and attach it to himself"). Note also Plutarch *Marius* 6.

³ We remember that Caesar's start in public life was given him by Marius and Cinna in 86 B.C. when through their influence Caesar was chosen as *flamen dialis* (Vell. Pat. ii. 43; Suet. *Iul.* 1).

it will be recalled, he delivered the funeral oration of his aunt, Marius' widow,¹ and *περὶ τὴν ἐκφορὰν ἐτόλμησεν εἰκόνας Μαρίου προθέσθαι, τότε πρῶτον ὀφθείσας μετὰ τὴν ἐπὶ Σύλλα πολιτείαν. . . .*² During his aedileship (65 B.C.) *tropaea Gai Mari de Iugurtha deque Cimbris atque Teutonis olim a Sulla disiecta restituit*;³ Plutarch tells us that many shed tears of joy at the sight, *καὶ μέγας ἦν ὁ Καῖσαρ ἐγκωμίοις αἰρόμενος, ὥς ἀντὶ πάντων ἄξιος [εἶη ὁ] ἀνὴρ τῆς Μαρίου συγγενείας.*⁴

What more natural than that, at the very time when Caesar was stressing his position as Marius' relative and successor, a people which had fought successfully with Marius in one of his greatest battles should feel enthusiasm for Caesar and be ready to follow him in his plots? What, moreover, more natural than that they should be spoken of by the name which recalled the victory and the tie with Marius?

Ambronas is therefore, in my opinion, the correct reading; it refers, however, not to the tribe allied with the Cimbri and Teutons, but to the Ligurians who fought with Marius in that great battle.

Oudendorp, Baumgarten-Crusius, and Mommsen in their discussions of the passage mention, in passing, the fact that the name Ambrones was also used by the Ligurians, but none of them pauses to consider whether it may not be this people that Suetonius refers to in telling of the plans of the conspirators.

The reading *Ambronas* is not only an easy one paleographically, but gives us the clue to the tie which linked these Ligurians to Caesar.

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¹ Suet. *Iul.* vi. 1.

² Plut. *Caes.* 5.

³ Suet. *Iul.* xi. See also Plut. *Caes.* 6 and Vell. Pat. ii. 43. 4.

⁴ Plut. *Caes.* 6.